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Sustainable development

Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/218; it provides an update on actions taken by Governments, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and major groups to ensure the effective implementation of and follow-up to the commitments and time-bound goals and targets in the area of sustainable development, including through partnerships for sustainable development.

The report shows that there is encouraging progress at all levels in pursuing sustainable development. At the intergovernmental level, the Commission on Sustainable Development at its first review session carried out an in-depth review of water, sanitation and human settlements, and enhanced the understanding of priority concerns by identifying key constraints and obstacles in implementation. Within the United Nations system, efforts to ensure a coordinated follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development are bearing concrete results. At the regional level, there has been great support for a regional implementation track to complement global action. At the national level, the sharper focus on implementation established at the Summit is inspiring Governments to take renewed action in various areas, not least in water, sanitation and human settlements. Over 50 countries submitted national information on such action to the twelfth session of the Commission. The composite picture emerging from those updates points to a strong commitment to implementation.

* A/59/150.
** Submission of the present report was delayed in order to incorporate updated information.

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I. Background

1. In its resolution 58/218, the General Assembly reaffirmed the continuing need to ensure a balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development. The Assembly reiterated that sustainable development is a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities, in particular for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation). The Assembly called upon Governments, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and relevant international and regional organizations, as well as major groups, to take action to ensure the effective implementation of the commitments, goals and time-bound targets, including through partnership initiatives.

2. In the same resolution the Assembly requested, inter alia, the Secretary-General to strengthen system-wide inter-agency cooperation and coordination in implementation; urged the regional commissions to contribute to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development; and requested the Economic and Social Council to implement the provisions of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation relevant to its mandate.

3. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Assembly resolution 58/218 to provide an update on progress in implementation. To avoid duplication, the report excludes information on activities that will be considered by the Assembly under other items, such as those related to the United Nations Environment Programme; the United Nations Human Settlements Programme; the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa; and matters relating to small island developing States. Separate reports under those items will be submitted to the Assembly.

II. Follow-up action taken at the intergovernmental level

4. Governments, United Nations organizations, regional institutions, and major groups have been inspired by the Plan of Implementation to intensify efforts to follow through with the commitments they collectively agreed upon at the Summit. The Commission has been gearing up for a critical role in that endeavour. As the high-level intergovernmental body within the United Nations on sustainable development, the Commission has taken the lead in advancing sustainable development goals and objectives. To align its work with the emerging focus on implementation, the Commission has undertaken significant reform measures in its new programme and method of work, resulting in important outcomes at its twelfth session, its first review and substantive session since the Summit.

A. Outcomes of the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

5. Over 100 ministers with various portfolios, including finance and development cooperation, along with some 1,400 delegates and observers, attended the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which was held from 14 to 30 April 2004 in New York. Under the able chairmanship of Børge Brende (Norway), the Commission introduced innovations into its organization of work. It was a session characterized by a number of firsts: thematic reviews were conducted through interactive discussions, which followed some 50 short but focused expert presentations; major groups' participation was integrated throughout the session; and five regional discussions were organized, which added depth to the work of the Commission by bringing regional perspectives into the review.

6. Two other features of the session were partnership fairs and the learning centre, which for the first time became part of the official programme of a Commission session. By showcasing some 80 partnerships registered with the Commission and facilitating interactive discussions on common partnerships issues, the partnership fairs afforded a timely opportunity for reviewing progress, sharing experiences and networking among partners. The Learning Centre, featuring 18 three-hour capacity-building courses, provided practical, hands-on lessons on various aspects of implementation. Some courses, such as the ones on national strategies for sustainable development, on integrated water resource management and on Global Environment Facility project fund application procedures, attracted a large turnout, filling the conference room to capacity. Institutions offering courses included Harvard University, Columbia University, La Sapienza (University of Rome), Hokkaido University, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Smithsonian Institute.

7. The review showed that a considerable number of countries are not on track with regard to reaching goal 7, targets 10 and 11, of the Millennium Development Goals, which concern halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015 and improving the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers. In many countries, slums are growing at an alarming pace. The persistence of poverty continues to hinder efforts to achieve progress in providing basic services and the lack of financial resources, technology and capacity remains the major constraint for developing countries. Low levels of community participation and inadequate empowerment of women in resource management and governance have hampered efforts to mobilize local initiatives.

8. In reviewing country experiences, the Commission drew attention to important interlinkages among the Millennium Development Goals and the goals and targets of the Plan of Implementation. It emphasized that achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the goals and targets of the Plan of Implementation concerning water, sanitation and human settlements is crucial for achieving poverty reduction and the other goals and commitments contained in the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Implementation. The strategic role of sanitation was stressed, with many participants pointing out that sanitation had not received as much attention as water and that neither of them had had much prominence in existing poverty reduction strategy papers.

9. The challenge of financing was addressed both in the thematic reviews and at a political level during the high-level segment. There was general agreement that current levels of financing were far from adequate and that development partners should, in the spirit of mutual accountability, meet the commitments of the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development and target an increased amount of funding to meet water, sanitation and human settlements commitments. Many delegations highlighted the need for exploring multiple avenues of financial resource mobilization, including partial loan guarantees, special facilities, revolving funds and microcredit schemes. Official development assistance should be used to support financing programmes targeted at the poor and to catalyse other financial resources to achieve a multiplier effect on domestic resource mobilization. Debt swaps for sustainable development could be used to address specific funding needs.

10. The Commission recognized that integrated water resources management provides a holistic framework for water sector reforms and for balancing water use among competing purposes, including sanitation and ecosystem services. However, it noted with concern significant delays and the likelihood that many countries would not meet the 2005 deadline for preparing integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans.

11. Regarding shelter, the Commission noted that action in improving the livelihood of urban slum-dwellers must be combined with policies to support sustainable development in rural areas in order to slow down rural to urban migration. It was further pointed out that local economies need to be stimulated and supported to enable vibrant informal businesses to develop into formal companies with reduced transaction costs and greater employment opportunities.

12. The outcomes of the review are contained in the Chairman's summary provided in chapter II of the report.[1] Part I of the summary provides a review of obstacles and constraints and lessons learned; part II summarizes discussions held during the high-level segment, including a section entitled "Responding to challenges: the way forward". Together, the two parts of the summary provide an important input for policy discussion and commitment to action for the thirteenth session of the Commission, which will be a policy session.

B. Economic and Social Council

13. The Plan of Implementation called on the Economic and Social Council to, inter alia, increase its role in overseeing system-wide coordination and the balanced integration of economic, environmental and social aspects of United Nations policies and programmes aimed at promoting sustainable development; organize periodic consideration of sustainable development themes in regard to the implementation of Agenda 21, including the means of implementation; and make full use of its high-level, coordination, operational and general segments to effectively take into account all relevant aspects of the work of the United Nations on sustainable development.

14. At the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2004, the Economic and Social Council considered resource mobilization and enabling environments for poverty eradication in the least developed countries. In the resulting ministerial declaration, the Council highlighted critical elements of sustainable development in

the least developed countries and called for integrating reconstruction and recovery into the sustainable development of the least developed countries emerging from conflict situations.

15. The Council also considered its role in the follow-up to the Summit with regard to the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits. The Council considered a recommendation contained in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2004/71) and discussed the option of devoting one of its coordination segments to sustainable development issues in the United Nations system.[2]

III. Inter-agency cooperation and coordination

16. Since the Summit, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system have stepped up their collaboration in helping member States to meet the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Implementation goals and targets, building upon, in many instances, existing mechanisms. As summarized in its annual overview report to the Economic and Social Council (E/2004/67), the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) has taken the lead in coordinating system-wide follow-up activities. The deliberations of CEB have focused on the identification of challenges facing the United Nations system in implementation, establishing guidelines for promoting coherent responses at the operational level and developing inter-agency mechanisms to replace or redesign the former task manager system in key areas of the follow-up to the Summit.

17. CEB highlighted a number of broad principles to guide the elaboration of inter-agency collaborative arrangements, including focusing on implementation at all levels (global, regional and national); pursuing the follow-up to the Summit within the overall context of summit/conference follow-up processes; and gearing inter-agency work with a view to maximizing support for the two-year implementation cycles adopted by the Commission.

18. In the light of those principles, CEB took steps through its High-Level Committee on Programmes to establish or strengthen inter-agency collaborative arrangements in the key areas of freshwater, water and sanitation, energy, oceans and coastal areas, and consumption and production patterns. Specific actions taken included the following:

(a) Confirming UN-Water as the inter-agency mechanism for the implementation of the Plan of Implementation water-related provisions and the Millennium Development Goals concerning freshwater. The terms of reference and modalities of work of UN-Water cover the elements of a detailed inter-agency plan for addressing water as well as sanitation issues, and include mechanisms for interacting with non-United Nations system stakeholders;

(b) Strengthening inter-agency support for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, including its related programmes for mitigating the effects of extreme water-related events;

(c) Setting up, in follow-up to the Plan of Implementation and Assembly resolution 57/141, an inter-agency mechanism to ensure effective information sharing and enhance coherence in the policies and wide spectrum of activities in the United Nations system relating to oceans and coastal areas;

(d) CEB endorsement of the 10-year framework of programmes on changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production being developed in the context of the Marrakesh Process as the basis for inter-agency collaboration;

(e) Setting up a new system-wide collaborative mechanism to address the energy related aspects of the Plan of Implementation.

19. At its twelfth session, the Commission also reviewed inter-agency mechanisms in the context of the programme of work decisions made at its eleventh session. Delegates agreed on the importance of collective and cooperative work among United Nations agencies at the global, regional, subregional, and field levels, based on their mandates and comparative advantages. Such cooperation should help to avoid inter-agency duplication while ensuring synergies and complementarities, and enhancing capacity-building in developing countries. Delegates further noted that modalities of involving non-United Nations actors needed to be carefully worked out.

20. In addition, a number of delegates noted the importance of having inter-agency work on sustainable development derive from, and closely follow, the intergovernmental mandates reflected in the Plan of Implementation. The Plan of Implementation clearly identified areas in which inter-agency cooperation and coordination were needed. In the future, it would be important to report on inter-agency activities in the areas under review by the Commission.

IV. Regional activities

21. An important feature of the Summit was its emphasis on regional implementation, as reflected in the Plan of Implementation, three chapters of which are devoted to regional initiatives. Regional and subregional cooperation enables countries in a region or subregion, especially small countries, to pool together limited resources to strengthen their capacity for dealing with shared challenges in sustainable development.

22. The past two years have seen further collaboration involving the regional commissions, regional development banks and other regional institutions. The regional commissions, with the assistance of the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development, organized regional meetings and ad hoc sessions on water, sanitation and human settlements as contributions to the twelfth session of the Commission.

23. The African regional meeting was held in Addis Ababa in December 2003, within the context of the Pan-African Conference on Implementation and Partnership on Water. The meeting identified constraints, opportunities and challenges facing the African region in water, sanitation and human settlements and brought into sharp focus the water and sanitation crisis in Africa, as well as the challenge of rapid urbanization.

24. Another initiative in the region was the first African expert meeting on sustainable consumption and production, held in Casablanca, Morocco, in May 2004, in the context of the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production. Participants in the meeting included experts from Governments, national cleaner production centres, academia, civil society, the private sector and international organizations. The meeting adopted a statement

requesting the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment to include sustainable consumption and production in its programme of work and to include initiatives that promote sustainable consumption and production in the programme of work of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

25. The regional meeting for Asia and the Pacific was held in Bangkok in October 2003, in association with a regional workshop on national sustainable development strategies, which was sponsored by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. The meeting identified major achievements and challenges facing the region with regard to implementation, as well as lessons learned. It also examined existing partnerships in water, sanitation and human settlements in the region.

26. The regional forum on sustainable development within the Economic Commission for Europe region, held in Geneva in January 2004, assessed the regional situation with respect to water, sanitation, human settlements and related cross-cutting issues. The forum assessed the obstacles and challenges with respect to the great disparity in the region and identified a number of examples of good practices, which were issued in an annex to a document of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE/AC.25/2004/2).

27. Three meetings were held in the Latin America and the Caribbean region in preparation for the twelfth session of the Commission: (a) regional forum of ministers of housing and urban development (La Paz, 5-7 November 2003); (b) an international seminar on the outcomes of the Summit (Santiago, 17-18 November 2003); and (c) the fourteenth meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment (Panama City, 20-25 November 2003). The three meetings focused on the achievements, challenges and lessons learned in the region in the respective areas of water, sanitation and human settlements, taking into account cross-cutting issues.

28. The Latin America and the Caribbean region took another significant step forward at the thirtieth session of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), held in July 2004 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Delegates approved the creation of a regional preparatory intergovernmental forum, as part of ECLAC activities, to monitor decisions made at the Summit.

29. In the West Asia region, the fourth session of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab World, held in Cairo in October 2003, focused on the themes of water, sanitation and human settlements as well as governance for sustainable development. The session adopted a number of resolutions aimed at implementation of the outcomes of the Summit that were subsequently submitted to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment at its meeting in December 2003.

V. Country initiatives

30. Following up the commitments made at the Summit will be the yardstick of the success or failure of the Summit. Two years after the Summit was held, information gathered from a considerable number of countries suggests that Governments are taking action in various areas to accelerate progress in implementation.

31. In many instances, such action has focused on national policies, strategies and legislation. Morocco, for example, is launching a new "city without slums" strategy

in 2004. Bulgaria amended its Law on Territorial Development in December 2003, by which the State territory is considered a national treasure and its development is required to ensure sustainable development and favourable living, labour and recreational conditions for the population. Australia has implemented, and is continuing to implement, a range of freshwater-related strategies, including the 2003 Council of Australian Governments national water initiative, which updated the 1994 water reform framework. The United Kingdom has published its Water Act 2003, which has legislated changes to enable the more sustainable management of water resources. Belgium is preparing its second federal plan on sustainable development 2004-2008, which will be more focused on the themes of the European Union sustainable development strategy.

32. In the follow-up to the Summit, some Governments also reoriented the thrust of their national development policy. The Government of China, for example, has put forward a new vision of development that is centred on sustainable development. The new vision calls for coordinated development between urban and rural areas, between different parts of the country, between economy and society, between man and nature, and between domestic development and foreign trade and investment. The objective is to build up national capacity for sustainable development and improve living standards and environmental quality.

33. Responding to the call of the Plan of Implementation to take immediate steps in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005, the Government of India has initiated the process of preparing a national sustainable development strategy. The draft strategy will go through an iterative process of political, technical and stakeholder consultations. India is of the view that the national strategies process should be continuous, involving the three elements of planning, action and feedback.

34. In September 2003, Peru held a workshop to discuss the elaboration of its national strategies for sustainable development. The workshop recommended that the formulation of the national strategies of Peru be implemented within one year.

35. The Government of Norway, having approved its national strategies for sustainable development in 2002, submitted a national plan of action in October 2003 as an integral part of the national budget to help advance progress in implementation of the national strategies. Slovenia is also preparing its own national strategy, entitled "Strategy of the development of Slovenia: the challenges of the future". In its strategy, Slovenia will consistently apply the sustainability principles of integration and will include economic development, social development and environmental protection. It will also represent a broad framework and provide guidance for sectoral strategies.

36. In the face of rapid urbanization, South Africa has undertaken historic efforts to provide secure shelter for its population. The last decade has seen 1.5 million houses constructed, with approximately 6 million citizens having received housing since 1994. In March 2003, the Government also published its first draft of the national water resources strategy to be finalized in March 2004. The Government has also put in place a national programme to deliver basic sanitation to 18 million people who currently do not have access to it.

37. Some donor Governments have provided targeted assistance to developing countries in the follow-up to the Summit. Belgium, for instance, provided funding to

support the development of the water supply and sanitation components of the poverty reduction strategy papers for African countries, utilizing the Belgian trust fund with the World Bank.

38. Japan has installed a low-cost, on-site, municipal wastewater treatment system (known as *johkasou*) in Indonesia. Moreover, Japan has transferred construction technology, operation and maintenance of *johkasous* to the local community and is developing a manual for wider distribution. This experience has demonstrated the importance of transferring the skills and systems necessary for proper operation and maintenance to local communities.

39. The United States of America, in collaboration with a number of developed and developing countries, convened the first Earth Observation Summit in Washington, D.C., on 31 July 2003, to promote the development of a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustained Earth observation system or systems with a view to understanding and addressing global environmental and economic challenges. As a result of the Earth Observation Summit, an ad hoc group on Earth observations was established to prepare a 10-year implementation plan for a coordinated, comprehensive, and sustained Earth observation system or systems.

40. The second Earth Observation Summit was held in Tokyo on 25 April 2004. At present, some 44 countries and 26 international organizations, as well as the European Commission, are working together on the 10-year implementation plan. It is hoped that the initiative, launched in response to the Summit, will change and improve how we perceive and understand planet Earth, thereby contributing to enhanced capacity for sustainable development everywhere.

41. United Nations organizations have assisted Governments in implementing country initiatives, including initiatives at the community level. For instance, UNDP has launched a community water initiative in Guatemala, Kenya, Mauritania, Sri Lanka and the United Republic of Tanzania to provide small grants in support of community activities in water supply, household sanitation and local watershed management. After its 2003/2004 pilot phase, the community water initiative will be evaluated and refined, based on experience in pilot countries and lessons learned. UNDP will seek additional funding to expand the initiative.

VI. Major groups

42. Major groups continue to play multiple roles in sustainable development at various levels. They utilize their expertise and knowledge to promote education in sustainable development, raise awareness of social, economic and environmental issues and monitor progress towards the implementation of sustainable development. They also contribute to implementation through participation in their own initiatives and in partnerships for sustainable development.

43. At its twelfth session, the Commission provided new and increased participatory mechanisms for engaging major groups in its work. Major groups representatives prepared discussion papers that were made available in the six official languages of the United Nations, interacted with experts and delegates throughout thematic discussions and joined ministers in a dedicated dialogue at the high-level segment of the session.

44. At the conclusion of the high-level segment, representatives of major groups pledged to continue to enhance partnerships and actions in civil society and to engage at all levels to implement Summit outcomes. They also undertook to complement efforts by Governments to strengthen the capacity of households, local communities, indigenous peoples, women, youth and other relevant groups to participate actively in implementing water, sanitation and human settlements programmes.

45. The twelfth session of the Commission marked a high point in the engagement of major groups in the work of the Commission. Nearly 700 major groups representatives attended the session, where they made a total of 86 interventions on water, sanitation and human settlements. Major groups especially welcomed the variety of opportunities provided to them whereby they could interact with experts and delegates in thematic discussions. They called upon other functional commissions to follow the inclusive approach of the Commission to their participation.

VII. Partnerships for sustainable development

46. Voluntary partnerships aimed at implementing sustainable development continue to complement action in implementation at various levels. As of June 2004, 291 partnerships had been registered with the secretariat of the Commission.

47. While the registered partnerships vary considerably in terms of size, scope and duration, there are certain common themes that resonate through all of them. Partnerships for sustainable development are collaborative initiatives focused on finding solutions. Most employ a bottom-up approach, using pilot projects to test their strategies, before replicating their models at national, subregional and regional levels. The outputs from partnerships vary considerably, ranging from direct technology transfer of specific solutions to the creation of networks.

48. Registered partnerships also vary considerably in geographic scope and duration. Geographic coverage ranges from initiatives focusing on specific regions to those mobilizing global campaigns. The projected duration of partnerships ranges from a two-year horizon to an open-ended time frame.

49. The provision of predictable and sustained resources, whether based on financial resources or non-financial contributions, is a key prerequisite for partnership implementation. Three fourths of the registered partnerships have reported that they have secured funding, while the remainder are awaiting contributions from donors.

50. Some registered partnerships are fully operational, while others are in the organizational phase. Based on the information reported to the Commission at its twelfth session, it appears that the organizational phase takes considerable time and requires considerable resources. Initial activities normally included finding partners, securing funding, defining coordination modalities, establishing a web site, conducting outreach activities and developing implementation strategies. It is anticipated that an increasing number of registered partnerships will be reporting progress towards implementation goals in the upcoming reporting cycles to the Commission.

51. At its twelfth session, the Commission also reviewed the progress in the implementation of partnership initiatives. While there was general support for partnerships for sustainable development, a number of delegates noted that funding for partnerships was coming mainly from Governments and emphasized the need for mobilizing new resources. The view was expressed that greater private sector involvement was needed. Some delegates made the observation that partnerships seem to have been donor-driven; the need for more demand-driven partnerships was thus underlined.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

52. The present report shows that there is encouraging progress in implementation at national, regional and international levels. Far more action is under way than can be described in the present report. National reports submitted by some 50 Governments to the Commission at its twelfth session paint, in broad strokes, a landscape of activities and initiatives. Regional implementation has also progressed, as can be seen in regional initiatives and regional meetings on sustainable development. CEB efforts to strengthen inter-agency collaborative mechanisms are encouraging system-wide implementation. Partnerships for sustainable development are beginning to demonstrate their potential as effective instruments for implementation. Major groups, including business and industry, are making increasing contributions to sustainable development. Their valuable roles as partners in implementation cannot be overemphasized.

53. The challenge ahead is to sustain that energy and galvanize further initiatives. At its twelfth session, the Commission identified the constraints and obstacles in implementation. The next step is to tackle the policy options and possible actions required to address those difficulties. Most importantly, the international community needs to transform the mutual accountability and the spirit of global partnership between developed and developing countries into concrete results.

54. To that end, it is recommended that the Assembly:

(a) Urge Governments to continue to implement Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and provide, through streamlined procedures, national information to the Commission secretariat with a view to achieving a broader exchange of lessons learned and best practices;

(b) Call on Governments to continue providing support to the Commission, including through contributions to the Commission trust fund, with a view to enhancing support for regional implementation initiatives and major groups participation in the work of the Commission;

(c) Request CEB to monitor the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the new or redesigned collaborative mechanisms in the follow-up to the Summit, taking into account the review outcome of the twelfth session of the Commission;

(d) Call upon donor Governments and international financial institutions to target funding support to developing countries in the priority

areas identified during the twelfth session of the Commission, including integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans, as well as national strategies for sustainable development, taking into account the time-bound targets in the Plan of Implementation.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 9* (E/2004/29).

[2] The Economic and Social Council decided to continue consultations on a multi-year work programme for the coordination segment, with a view to finalizing the programme before the next substantive session.